

## PLOTINIAN PERSONALITY V — CHOICE

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This lesson in the Enneads of Plotinus is a consideration of Problems of the Soul (I) through sections eight to eleven of the tractate, and the ultimate fullness of living is here an acceptance of the importance of a soul-actuated desire and acquisitiveness. No fullness of life is gained through negation or denial, and the way to conquer sense-bound selfishness is not to denude being nor to accept any other form of the selfishness of nonpossession but is to permeate the self's seeking with a sharing of genuine personality and a fullness of true appreciation of soul. Ordinary selfishness does not distress the skilled occultist because it is at least a dynamic of character, and it is far more simple to redirect the powers of self than to call them forth from total inactivity. But the selfishness of nonpossession is the greatest sort of human unsocial act. It is the type of apathy most generally hopeless in its lack of response to an eternal fellowship. Superficially it is the refusal to bear the freight of the social order by seeking to avoid all manner of self-expenditure or by being willing to gain and to take but only if with an utter escape from obligation. Philosophically it is more insidious in its appeal or is a mastery of life by a supposed withdrawal into the life of the higher and an acceptance of phantasy in lieu of actual experience. Plotinus as taken literally is not above this error, and it is characteristic of Eastern transcendentalism. Conventional occultism perpetuates the idea largely because of its appeal to the defeated individual. Thus men whose ideals are not large enough to embrace the worldwide instability of the modern crisis of civilization are inclined to see in the spiritual separation the means to their fellowship with eternity. But when stripped from all ornamentation and rationalization the selfishness of nonpossession becomes no more than the common I-won't play attitude of little souls in every age. Participation and not withdrawal is the law of true spiritual existence, and the realization of capacity and not a sense of powerlessness is the key to genuine self-unfoldment. Plotinus identifies infinity as an ultimate of power. What reaches out to eternity must do so in its use or its expression. And then he proceeds to a statement that is the very foundation of New Thought and of all genuine occultism, namely, "Each soul in the right of its own power is all it chooses to be!" Choice is the power of transcendence or the core of all personality.

The dynamic of consciousness is consequently the choice or free act in self-direction. Plotinus quotes Plato to the effect that "life choice has correspondence with former lives", and in a superficial way this is metempsychosis or an exoteric charting of destiny. More deeply and truly it is a realization that choice is never of an

isolated factor of experience but always of a totality. Former lives are the objectification of total fellowship in an immediate reality. The discussion of reincarnation is academic because what lives again of the past is a choice of the soul in the now and all choice in its wholeness embraces all-experience. Consciousness takes to itself the reality of its kind. This ultimately has been lived by the race but is experienced by the individual only in his choosing or his acceptance of it in a moment of reality.

The sustaining value in personality is its faithfulness to the power or the choice of the soul. Soul does not go forth from itself, Plotinus explains, to lose unity by a measure of partition. There is in it an element apt to entrance into body, and this has the power of projection any-whither. The aptness to entrance or choice of participation is no cancellation of the soul's freedom, as though karma was attached to the soul itself or to the eternal reality in the depths of consciousness, but as aptness it is a wholeness of entrance and on entering into experience it consequently embraces the totality of past and future and adds to the limitation of the single life the fullness of past and future living.

The social genius of the soul is found in the basic totality of ensoulment. Approaching the problem of decay in the body when life is withdrawn, Plotinus identifies this natural economy of animal chemistry as an ensoulment by a larger group-life. Individual death is the body as such no longer receptive to soul or is life complexity so destroying choice as to cancel the continuing choice of embodiment, but death is only reversion to more universal or simple life and so a return to all-soul by soul and to all-body by body. Soul itself is nowhere lacking, and the cessation of division for experience is an act of larger experience. Larger soul has less need of the particular. It is generalized in more simple choice, but it lacks all personality in the realm of human and shared experience. Yet soul is sovereign over material things by this might of real being, and individual sovereignty is the power in a sustained choosing of that fellowship in which the being is truly social or totally-receptive to experience. The practical aspect of personality is the receptivity embodied in its choices, that is, in the fact that what is chosen is always an enlargement of the being through an increase of its total ensoulment. Plotinus shows that soul could not have gone forth in the absence of body. It is receptivity that permits choice, and receptivity is actually a component element in the choice. Recognition or ensoulment by the wholeness that is brought with selfhood as freight of its own is the invitation to individual participation in experience. In another way of expression man actually permeates the totality about him, but for knowing and self-realization he chooses and in division or specialization he makes particularly his own that which he particularly would share in fellowship of realization.

The individuality of personality lies in the operation of this particularizing function of choice. Adhering to a universal spirit in his belief, Plotinus yet gives testimony to the ancients who erected shrines and statues to divinity and thus gave appropriate receptacle for a momentary focus of divinity. Personality cannot share reality with an utter abstraction. Hence anthropomorphism is always necessary to give an individual realization of eternal livingness. Idol-worship is the caricature of that true symbolism of worship wherein personality is lent to idea or to transcendent choice, but life gains reality as man really establishes a place especially capable of receiving some portion or phase of eternity. The ultimate distinction of personality is in the self-sustaining major choices of life. First there is one-principal direction, mirrored in a continuance of typical living or adopted past existence. In modern times this conception becomes heredity and environmental influence, but personality at base is still the net of what in effect if not in act is a root choice. Thus in a given family one child will press on ahead of expectation and another will trail even the faint promise of his endowment. Character is spirit of living, and such fundamentally is a choice of personality. "The nature of the All is to make its entire content reproduce happily the Reason-Principle in which it participates", says Plotinus. Hence personality aggregates its whole self about its root choice.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND APPLICATION

- (1) What does Plotinus teach about a life of asceticism or self-denial? What two types of selfishness are discussed? Which is to be condemned? Why?
- (2) What New Thought foundation statement is made in connection with choice? What usually happens in the case of the man of little ideals? What is choice and what does it involve? What determines the depth and breadth and richness of your experience?
- (3) How does soul avail itself of the power of choice? What is soul's aptness of entrance? As soul enters into experience what happens to it?
- (4) How do you explain ensoulment and then the division for experience of soul? Are these contradictory terms? Discuss them. How does personality display receptivity? In what is such receptivity embodied? What shrines may a man rightly establish?
- (5) Why does Plotinus emphasize the necessity of anthropomorphism? What is character to personality? What is a root choice of personality? What major choices does personality make? What difference if any lies between these choices?